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WO 02/37305 A2

(54) Title: SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR THE SELECTION, SALE, MANUFACTURE AND/OR SHIPMENT OF PERSONALIZED FABRIC APPAREL ITEMS

(57) Abstract:

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates generally to a system and method for the selection, sale, manufacture and/or shipment of personalized fabric, preferably silk, apparel such as ties, scarves and foulards.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

High quality fabric apparel of designer quality, such as ties, scarves and foulards, have traditionally been offered for purchase in sales outlets such as up-scale boutique and department stores or by mail and phone order through a catalogue. Each retail outlet selling such apparel cultivates a particular atmosphere or effect designed to appeal to its target clientele and enhance the customer's experience. The customer is typically assisted with his buying needs by a knowledgeable sales associate who is familiar with the outlet's inventory and who is expert in determining the customer's sales needs. A sales associate often develops a relationship with a particular customer over time and will use the knowledge gained in building that sales relationship to make more sophisticated buying suggestions tailored to the customer's particular color, design and fabric preferences.

Typically, apparel sold through retail outlets is selected by a buyer with sales expertise in the specific product category. In selecting items for sale, the buyer attempts to identify apparel merchandise which will appeal to the average customer of that particular sales outlet. The buyer bases his choice of merchandise on many things, including the image that the sales outlet wishes to project, the desired customer base, the customer profile for that particular sales outlet, historical sales data at the outlet, the cost of the item, downstream discount options and the buyer's own personal taste and

experience in the product category. In addition, the buyer may select merchandise appropriate to the different seasons of the year as well as merchandise themed to special holidays or days, such as birthdays and anniversaries.

- The traditional retail outlet system with apparel merchandise pre-selected by a buyer and sold by a team of sales associates has several disadvantages. First of all, there is little or no flexibility for the sales outlet to offer merchandise in response to a new or changing fashion trend, since this purchase system requires that the buyer select merchandise for sale in a particular sales outlet months before it actually appears in the outlet in order to assure adequate and timely inventory. In this system, the sales outlet is locked into a particular type, quantity, color, fabric and/or pattern of merchandise and the customer's purchase options are restricted to what is in stock at the retail or catalogue outlet. As a result, the customer is often unaware that there are other items, colors, fabrics and/or patterns which may be more appropriate choices for the customer's particular purchase needs.
- Secondly, there is no opportunity for the retailer or catalogue to provide the customer with merchandise specifically customized or personalized for the customer's needs (e.g., a personalized message or name on an apparel item or selection of a special color, fabric and/or pattern for an apparel item) since merchandise is ordered "in bulk" or "en masse" before any particular customer has placed a merchandise order.
- Consequently, the pre-selection of merchandise restricts the customer's sales and purchase options to the particular items in stock. Although it may be possible to special-order and personalize a given item, a customer will typically decline to do so since it can take several weeks before the desired item can be obtained. This time gap

is particularly disadvantageous in the purchase of apparel items which are to a large degree time-limited or impulse purchases.

Another disadvantage of the traditional retail scheme is that poorly trained or inattentive sales associates at the outlet can negatively impact sales at an outlet. As
5 noted above, a good sales associate is intimately familiar with the inventory of the outlet and skilled in elucidating the needs of the customer in a helpful and unobtrusive manner. If served by an unknowledgeable or inattentive sales associate, a customer is likely to leave the store without making a purchase. Additionally, the customer is unlikely to query the associate as to the best possible combination of a particular item's
10 color, fabric and/or design and the customer's other apparel with which it is to be worn if the customer does not have confidence in the taste and fashion sense of the sales associate. For example, if a sales associate is not familiar enough with the store's inventory to make the necessary recommendation, a customer wishing to select the best color of a particularly designed tie to match an already purchased shirt may be
15 deprived of making that selection. A corollary disadvantage of the customer's lack of confidence in the sales associate is that the customer may be embarrassed to ask sales personnel for help in making a personal or gift selection or in matching the selected item with other apparel items by color, fabric and/or pattern.

There is a clear need for a new retail purchase model in which a customer has
20 access to the full array of design, fabric and/or color options for a particular apparel item and can customize his eventual purchase choice by design, color, fabric and/or optional personal message without visiting a retail outlet and making his purchase choice or decision through a sales associate. There is also a need for an "on-demand" system of

supplying apparel items to the discerning consumer wherein the particular item selected and purchased does not exist in inventory until the customer makes the final design, color, fabric and/or optional personal message choice for the item and orders the item from the supplier. Finally, there is a need for an apparel purchasing system in which
5 the sophisticated consumer has significant input into the actual design, fabric and/or color options available for a particular apparel item.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

An object of the present invention is to provide a system and method whereby
10 fabric apparel items such as ties, scarves and foulards can be custom-selected by an individual customer for color and design or pattern and ordered, manufactured and shipped to that same customer (or to another person if the fabric item is sent as a present) without going through a traditional retail or catalogue sales outlet. The inventive system and method is particularly applicable to fabric accessory items such as
15 ties, scarves and foulards. The customer may also optionally personalize the apparel item selected with a name or message of his choice. Typical fabrics utilized in the inventive system and method include silk, cashmere, cotton and the like as well as man-made fibers such as polyester, viscose, acetate, cupro and the like.

In accordance with one aspect of the invention, there is provided a system and
20 method for using a computer to access an on-line sales system through a computer network; viewing a selection of designs or patterns available for an apparel item; initially selecting a design or pattern for the apparel item; viewing a selection of related colors for the selected design or pattern or viewing related designs or patterns for the chosen

- color and design or pattern of the apparel item; optionally comparing the selected color and design or pattern with a shirt or other apparel item color to determine if the selected color and design or pattern combination is desirable; finally selecting a color and design or pattern for the apparel item; optionally selecting a personalized or stock message or
- 5 name to be incorporated into the previously chosen color and design or pattern of the apparel item; transmitting an order for the selected color and design or pattern of the apparel item with optionally incorporated message; receiving and confirming the order for the selected apparel item; transmitting the design, color and optional message information for the apparel item to a custom printing facility capable of producing high-
- 10 quality images on fabric along with a unique code or identifier (e.g., a number code or bar code) created specifically for the ordered apparel item wherein the code or identifier incorporates all relevant customer information for the apparel; printing the apparel item with the chosen design, color and optional message; printing the chosen color, design or pattern, optional personal message and identifier code on the chosen fabric; cutting
- 15 and sewing or otherwise finishing the printed fabric to produce the final customized apparel item; printing any ancillary items unique to the apparel item such as the shipping label and packaging the completed, customized apparel item along with any necessary labels or documents into a specially designed receptacle and shipping the package containing the customized apparel item to the customer.
- 20 In accordance with another aspect of the invention, there is provided a system and method for assisting a customer in selecting a design and color for an apparel item which are compatible with each other and compatible with a given shirt or other apparel color in the form of a "personal shopping assistant" comprising the steps of using a

computer to access an on-line sales system through a computer network; choosing the "personal shopping assistant" option on the on-line sales system; answering questions designed to narrow the customer's purchase options followed by selection of the fabric apparel item as detailed above.

- 5 In accordance with another aspect of the invention, there is provided a system and method for selecting, customizing and purchasing an apparel item organized around the concept of special "rooms", "environments", "occasions" or "themes" modeled on the actual types of shops or venues in which the items have been traditionally purchased or used to direct the customer's selection, customization and
- 10 purchase of the item through a combination of sights and sounds evocative of the particular shopping atmosphere emulated comprising the steps of using a computer to access an on-line sales system through a computer network; choosing a "room", "environment" or "theme" which has specific designs and/or colors which can be used for an apparel item; viewing a selection of designs or patterns available for the apparel
- 15 item in the selected "room", "environment" or "theme"; initially selecting a design or pattern for the apparel item; viewing a selection of colors or related designs or patterns available for the chosen design or pattern of the apparel item; optionally comparing the selected color and design or pattern with a shirt or other apparel color to determine if the selected color and design or pattern combination is desirable; finally selecting a
- 20 color and design or pattern for the apparel item; optionally selecting a personalized or stock message or name to be incorporated into the previously chosen color and design or pattern of the apparel item; transmitting an order for the selected color and design or pattern of the apparel item with optionally incorporated message; receiving and

confirming the order for the selected apparel item; transmitting the design, color and optional message information for the apparel item to a custom printing facility capable of producing high-quality images on fabric along with a unique code or identifier created specifically for the ordered apparel item wherein the code or identifier incorporates all
5 relevant customer information for the apparel item; printing the chosen color, design or pattern, optional personal message and identifier code on the chosen fabric; cutting and sewing or otherwise finishing the printed fabric to produce the final customized apparel item; printing any ancillary items unique to the apparel item such as the shipping label; packaging the completed, customized apparel item into a specially designed receptacle
10 and shipping the package containing the customized apparel item to the customer.

The inventive system and method set forth above can employed with all fabrics which are compatible with high quality fabric printing systems. Preferred fabrics include silk, cashmere, cotton and the like as well as man-made fibers such as polyester, viscose, acetate, cupro and the like.

15

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 is a block diagram illustrating one embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 2A, 2B and 2C comprise a flow chart of the overall method employed by one
20 embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 3 is a flow chart illustrating the "personal assistant" option of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Figure 1 depicts a system for the design or selection, sale, manufacture and/or shipment of personalized apparel items. As shown in Figure 1, a client computer 100
5 capable of running an internet browser such as Netscape Navigator or Internet Explorer or other web browsers logs onto an on-line sales system 110 through a computer network such as the internet 120. The on-line sales system 110, divides the available apparel product lines into various subsegments as set forth in more detail in Figure 2 for ease and speed of navigation through the website. A standard fire wall 130 protects an
10 intranet 140 from attack by hackers. The intranet 140 links various subsystems which are integral to the sale, design, manufacture and shipment process. These subsystems, which are discussed more fully below, include a customer database and marketing system 150, a design database 160, a printing control system 170, a production scheduling system 180, a shipping and handling system 190 and an
15 interface to credit card network 200.

The customer database and marketing system 150 maintains the customer history, interests, design preferences, purchasing profiles and personal data for a customer which is keyed from a cookie on a returning customer or via a "log on" code and password assigned to customers who wish to join the website. The customer
20 database and marketing system 150 can also be used to generate e-mail and regular mail customer lists as well as to provide the raw data for market and promotional response analysis.

The design database 160 contains an on-line accessible library of all designs and patterns which can be viewed and selected by the customer. The database is an object-oriented database of design elements which can be accessed by the customer through the on-line sales system 110. For each design in the design database 160

5 there are associated four other designs that are related to it by style and pattern. The design database 160 includes, either on the same processor or a separate processor in the design cluster, the processing capability to produce "mock-ups" of the item selected by the customer available for viewing through the on-line sales system 110 interfaced to the internet 120. A design cluster, as used herein, is a group of independent computer

10 systems, referred to as nodes, working together as a unified computing resource which provide high availability and/or distribute and load balance network connections among servers. The "mock-up" will be a low-resolution image of the selected item which the customer may view as a magnified or "zoomed" image. When an order is completed by the customer the stock design or pattern selected is registered in the customer

15 database and marketing system 150 with pointers to the design elements and construction of the selected item and the order is then queued for production in the production scheduling system 180.

A production scheduling system 180 receives requests for production of apparel items from the customer database and marketing system 150. The production

20 scheduling system 180 organizes orders by material, color or other production criteria and schedules the printing tasks in an optimum way using a FIFO or "first in, first out" method with the load allocated among the various available printing methods. The production scheduling system 180 monitors raw material usage, alerts the production

department of the need-to-order various supplies as applicable and generally manages the "just-in-time" production of the apparel items offered for sale by the on-line sales system 110.

Printing of the fabric comprising the apparel item is controlled by the printing control system 170. This system comprises a plurality of different printing machines wherein each of the machines is capable of printing on a different fabric. The printing control system 170 regulates the rolling/unrolling system of the fabric in order to maintain a constant tension on the fabric while it is printed. The printing control system 170 also controls the set up of printing files by a computer program wherein the selected design or pattern is eventually repeated in the printing panel of fabric and the personal message (if chosen) and the product identifier or code are added at the same time.

In one embodiment of the printing control system 170, the plurality of printing machines comprises an ENCAD printer with a resolution of 600 DPI and operating at a rate of 2.7 meters/hour wherein the ENCAD printer is capable of two-way printing of 4 reactive colors at a maximum height of 105 centimeters; a MIMAKI I printer with a resolution of 720 DPI and operating at a rate of 1 or 2 meters/hour (e.g., 1 meter if 8 passages are done and 2 meters if 4 passages are done) wherein the MIMAKI I printer is capable of two-way printing of 6 reactive colors at a maximum height of 160 centimeters and a MIMAKI 2 printer with a resolution of 720 DPI and operating at a rate of 1 or 2 meters/hour (e.g., 1 meter if 8 passages are done and 2 meters if 4 passages are done) wherein the MIMAKI 2 printer is capable of two-way printing of 7 acid colors at a maximum height of 160 centimeters.

A shipping and handling system **190** controls the collection and "boxing" process and is responsible for assuring that all of the required elements for an order are complete (i.e., apparel item, box, ribbon, shipping label). Once the order is complete, the shipping and handling system **190** "hands off" the completed package to the
5 shipper.

An interface to a credit card network **200** creates the request for funds from the credit card network, checks for authorizations and generates accounting reports for reconciliation with the corporate accounting system.

U.S. Patent No. 5,930,769 is directed to an on-line sales system for fashion
10 shopping utilizing a computer network and is hereby incorporated by reference herein in its entirety.

Figure 2 is a flow chart illustrating an exemplary process by which a customer selects and purchases an apparel item using the inventive on-line sales system.

The customer first accesses the on-line sales system using a computer or
15 comparable hardware **100** (e.g., WebTV and similar units) which is capable of accessing a website comprising an on-line sales system **110** on a computer network such as the internet **120** directly through an on-line service such as America On-Line or an appropriately configured commercially available web browser program such as Netscape Navigator or Microsoft Explorer. Once connected to the on-line sales system
20 **110** through the computer network **120**, the customer views a selection of patterns available from and stored in the design database **160**.

The patterns are presented to the customer in a variety of formats. In one format, the patterns are grouped by type [e.g., floral or geometric] with one pattern

representing a family of similar patterns. In another format, the customer selects from a plurality of themed "rooms" or "environments" which have associated with them a plurality of designs or patterns which relate to the selected theme. In yet another format, designs or patterns are associated with a "theme" such as a holiday, personal milestone such as a birthday and the like. The customer first chooses a format **210**. The selected format comprised of a plurality of webpages comprised of a plurality of designs or patterns is then available for review by the customer. The customer reviews the available designs or patterns and makes an initial selection **220**. The customer's initially selected design or pattern is then displayed to the customer in a pop-up window which enables the customer to see the chosen design or pattern in a stylized representation of an apparel item.

The customer may now view the other color options for the initially selected design or pattern **230** and/or may view other designs or patterns that are related to the initially selected design or pattern **240**. If the customer chooses to view a related design or pattern, the color options and related design or patterns for the secondary choice will then be displayed. The customer may cycle through as many different color options and related designs or patterns and their respective color options and related designs or patterns as necessary until a desirable color/design or pattern combination is selected. Once a desirable color and design or pattern is chosen by the customer, the customer may choose to compare the selected color/design or pattern with different color shirts or apparel items and obtain the "opinion" of an "personal assistant" to determine if the selected combination is appropriate **250**. If this option is selected, clicking each different color shirt or other apparel item will elicit a comment or phrase from the on-line

personal assistant that will indicate whether or not the chosen combination is a desirable one. The customer may then choose to retain the selected color **251** and continue in the purchase sequence **260**. Or, the customer may reject the selected color and may either choose a new color and repeat the selection process or may choose a
5 new color and a new design pattern and repeat the selection process.

Once the customer has selected a final color and design or pattern for the chosen apparel item, the customer may choose to personalize the item **260**. If the customer chooses to personalize the item, the customer may create a unique message **262** or may designate the type of person for which the item has been selected (e.g.,
10 friend, lover) **263** and select a prepared message or may edit the text of a prepared message **264**. The final message is preferably 70 characters in length. However, any length of message compatible with the size of the apparel item and the positioning of the message on the apparel item is within the scope of the invention. The personalized message may be printed anywhere on the apparel item.

15 After the apparel item has been optionally personalized as described above, the customer decides whether or not it should be added to the customer's shopping bag. If the customer does not add the item to the shopping bag, the customer may exit the site, continue the selection process, browse other sections of the site and begin the selection process in another format, select apparel items using the "personal assistant" option or
20 purchase pre-selected items directly from special sales webpages which may be designated as "Limited Editions" or seasonal collections and the like.

If the customer decides to add the optionally personalized apparel item to the shopping bag, the customer will be asked if the customer is registered with the site **280**.

If not, the customer must complete the registration process before continuing 281 so that the "personal assistant" can remember the customer's selections in the customer's shopping bag. When the customer comes back to the website, the customer has the opportunity to view what had been placed in the shopping bag (and not necessarily
5 ordered) during the last on-line visit. If the customer is already registered, the customer has just to log in. The customer then continues in the purchase process by confirming the selection of the color and design or pattern of the chosen apparel item 290. The customer's credit card information is approved and the purchase is confirmed 300.

An order description summarizing the information obtained from steps 220-300
10 including a unique customer code or identifier is then created 310. The order is transmitted to computer-aided finishing and detailed and modified, if necessary 320. The order is next transmitted to print-scheduling for optimization of the printing process 330. The selected color and design or pattern is printed on the specified fabric, including the personalized message if included, to produce uncut material for the
15 apparel item 340. A unique code or identifier shipping label is then printed to accompany the uncut item material 350 and the coded information is transmitted to the customer database 351. The label identifies the item, design, color, any necessary modifications and all shipping and handling information. The uncut material is shipped to a specialized producer and the final item is cut and sewn or otherwise finished 360.
20 The code or identifier is then used to print any ancillary items unique to the apparel item 370. The completed apparel item is placed in a transit box with the shipping label and returned to the designer for final packing 380. The item is packed in a specially

designed gift container and placed in a shipping pack or box along with the necessary shipping documents 390. The final packed item is then shipped to the customer 400.

In another embodiment of the invention set forth in Figure 3, the customer may use a "personal assistant" to aid in the apparel item selection process by clicking on the
5 "personal assistant" icon 410A or by first choosing an apparel item such as a tie, foulard or scarf 410. The customer is then presented with a screen on which the customer may confirm the selection of the apparel item or choose a different apparel item 420. The customer then specifies the type of occasion or theme, if any, for which the item is intended 430. The customer next chooses a dominant color for the item using a color
10 selection tool such a color bar, rainbow, palette of colors and the like 440. The customer is then presented with a selection of colors and designs or patterns for the selected apparel item from the design database for review. The selection, purchase and production process then continues with step 220 on Figure 2.

The many features and advantages of the present invention are apparent from
15 the detailed specification and drawings, and thus, it is intended by the appended claims to cover all such features and advantages of the invention which fall within the true spirit and scope of the present invention.

Furthermore, since numerous modifications and variations will readily occur to those skilled in the art, it is not desired that the present invention be limited to the exact
20 construction and operation illustrated and described herein, and accordingly, all suitable modifications and equivalents which may be resorted to are intended to fall within the scope of the claims.

We claim:

1. A method for the production of fabric items, comprising the steps of:
 - displaying a selection of designs available for a fabric item on a user display screen;
 - accepting an initial design selection from the user of a design for the fabric item;
 - displaying a selection of related colors for the initial design selection of the fabric item on the user display screen;
 - providing for comparison of the initial design selection with at least one other related fabric item to determine if the initial design selection of the fabric item is desirable when combined with at least one other related fabric item;
 - accepting a final design selection from the user for the fabric item;
 - accepting a message to be incorporated with the final design selection of the fabric item; and
 - producing the fabric item in accordance with the final design selection and the message.
2. The method of claim 1 comprising the further step of packaging the completed, customized fabric item into a receptacle and shipping the receptacle to the customer.
3. The method of claim 1 comprising the further step of providing a unique identifier or code for the fabric item said identifier or code incorporating information relating to the fabric item.

4. The method of claim 1 wherein the selection of designs includes a plurality of colors.
5. The method of claim 1 wherein the selection of designs includes a plurality of patterns.
6. The method of claim 1 wherein the fabric item is selected from the group consisting of ties, scarves and foulards.
7. The method of claim 1 wherein the fabric is selected from the group consisting of silk, cashmere, cotton and man-made fibers.
8. The method of claim 7 wherein the fabric is silk.
9. The method of claim 6 wherein the fabric is silk.
10. The method of claim 1 wherein the message is no more than 70 characters in length.
11. A system for production of fabric items, comprising:
a user display screen for displaying a selection of designs available for a fabric item;
a central processor, said central processor adapted to:

accept an initial design selection from the user of a design for the fabric item;

display a selection of related colors for the initial design selection of the fabric item on the user display screen;

provide for comparison of the initial design selection with at least one other related fabric item to determine if the initial design selection of the fabric item is desirable when combined with at least one other fabric item;

accept a final design selection from the user for the fabric item;

accept a message to be incorporated with the final design selection of the fabric item; and

a fabric production apparatus for producing the fabric item in accordance with the final design selection and the message.

12. The system of claim 11 wherein the central processor is adapted to provide a unique identifier or code for the fabric item said identifier or code incorporating information relating to the fabric item.
13. The system of claim 11 wherein the selection of designs includes a plurality of colors.
14. The system of claim 11 wherein the selection of designs includes a plurality of patterns.
15. The system of claim 11 wherein the fabric item is selected from the group consisting of ties, scarves and foulards.

16. The system of claim 11 wherein the fabric is selected from the group consisting of silk, cashmere, cotton and man-made fibers.
17. The system of claim 16 wherein the fabric is silk.
18. The system of claim 15 wherein the fabric is silk.
19. The system of claim 11 wherein the message is no more than 70 characters in length.

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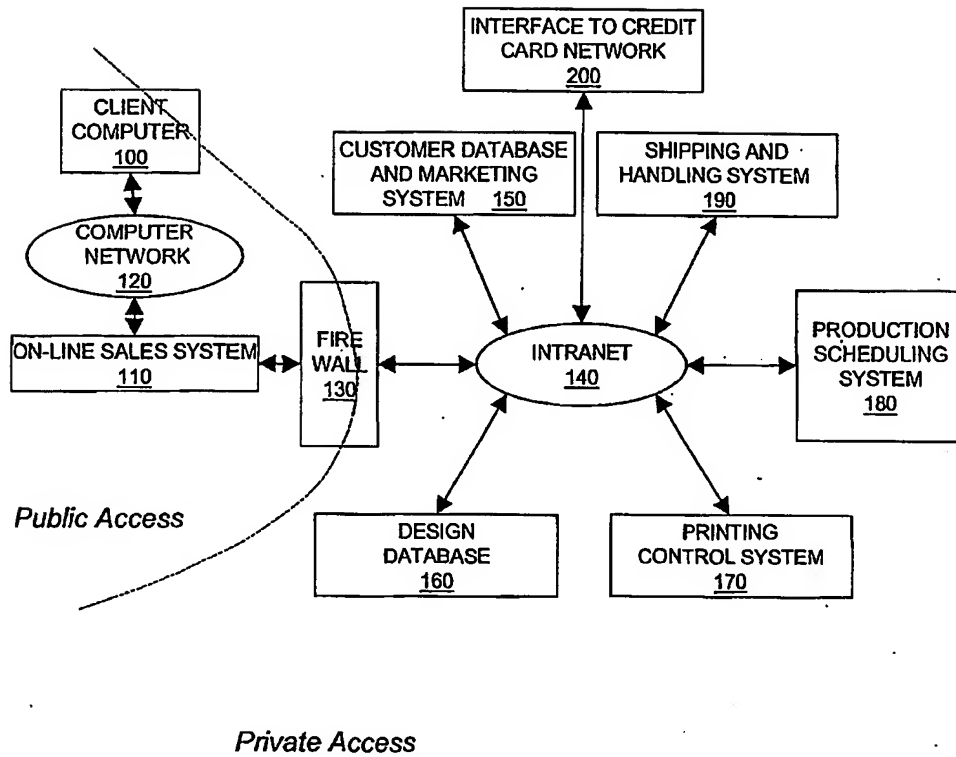


FIGURE 1

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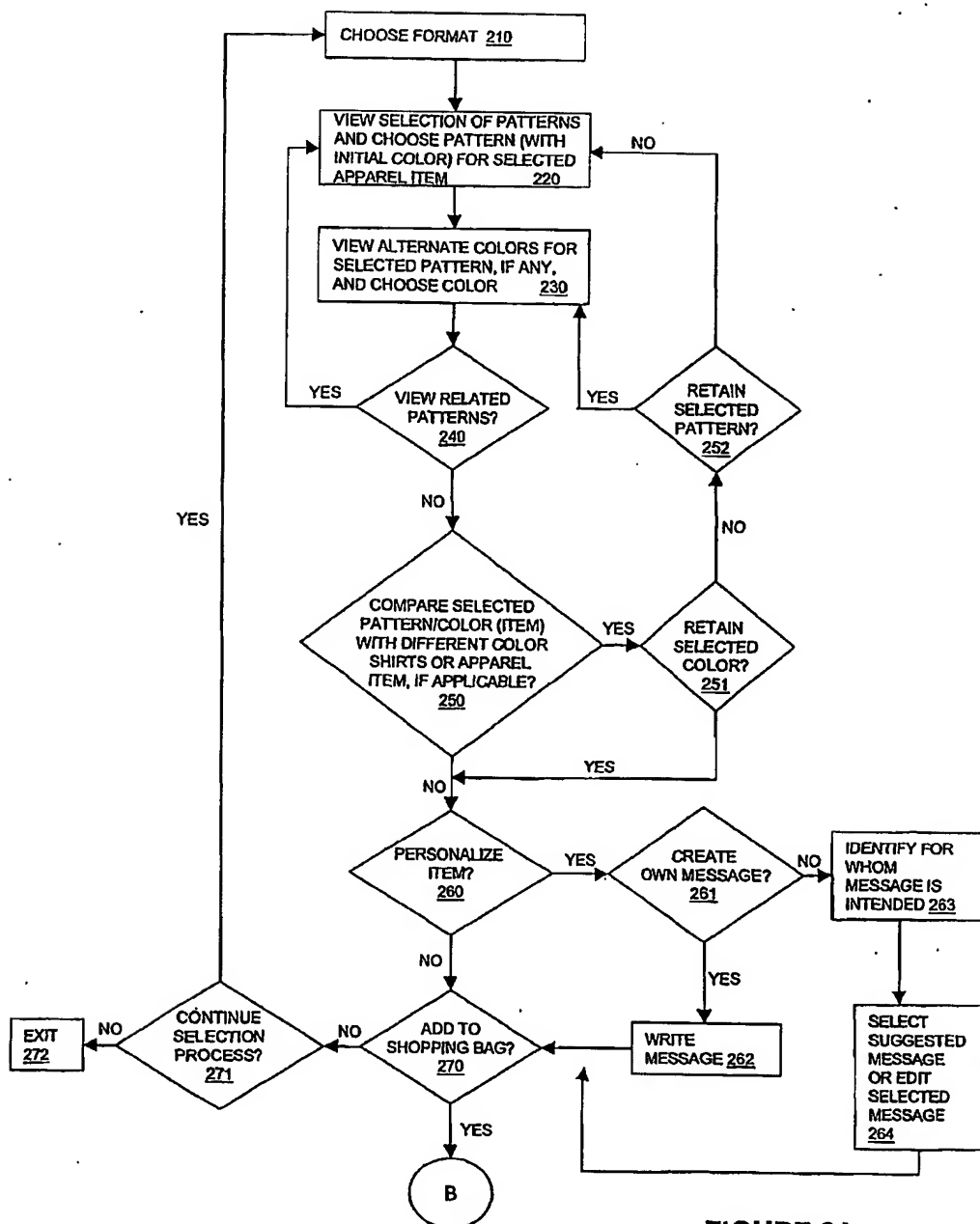


FIGURE 2A

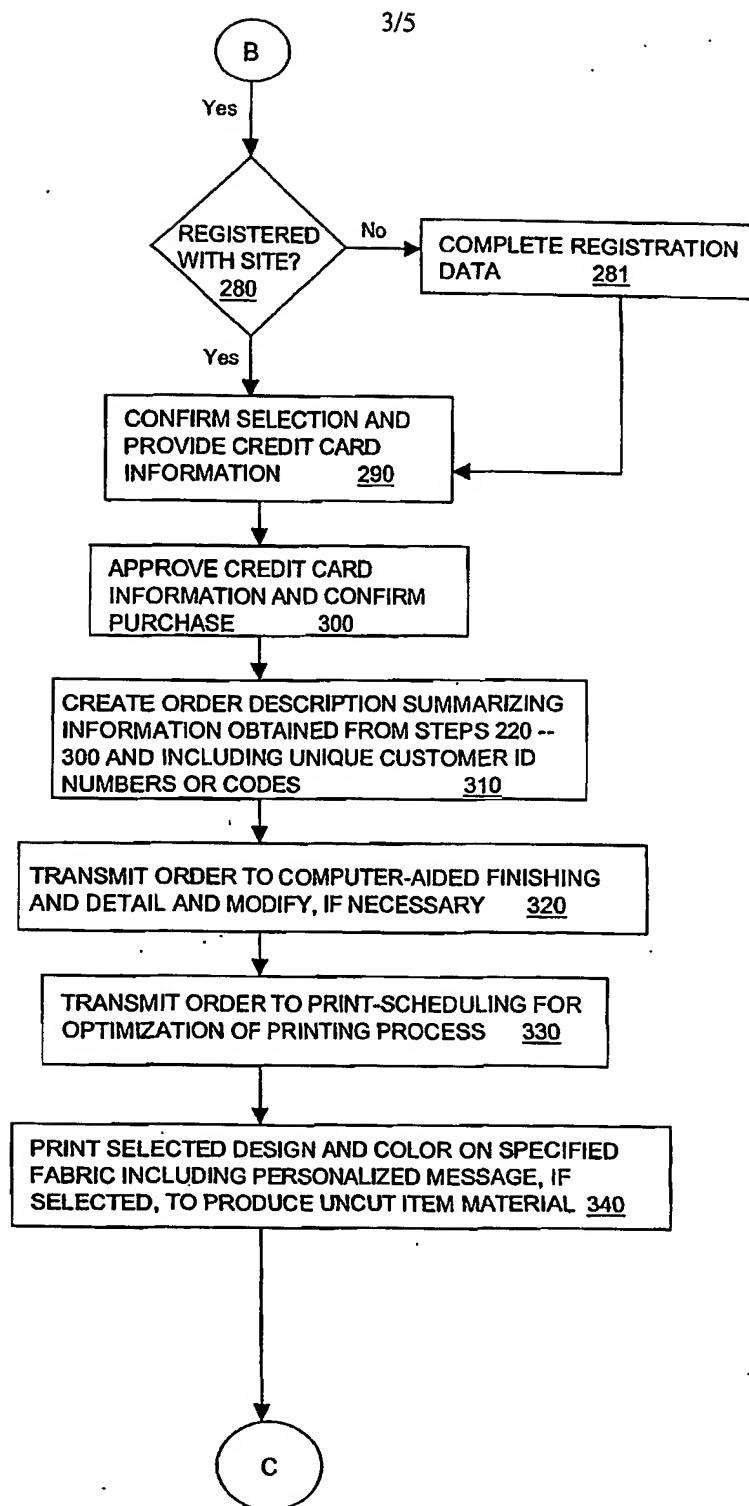


FIGURE 2B

4/5

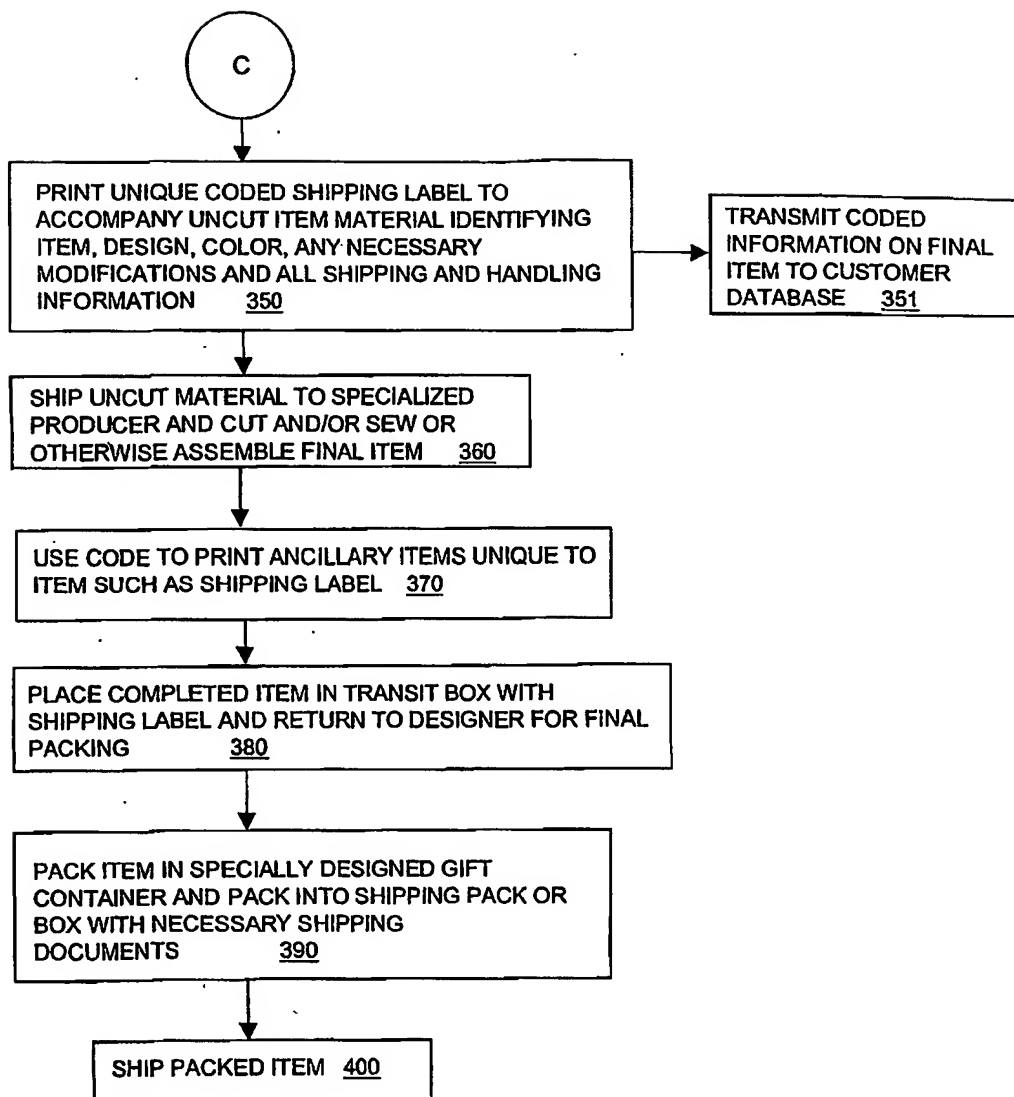


FIGURE 2C

5/5

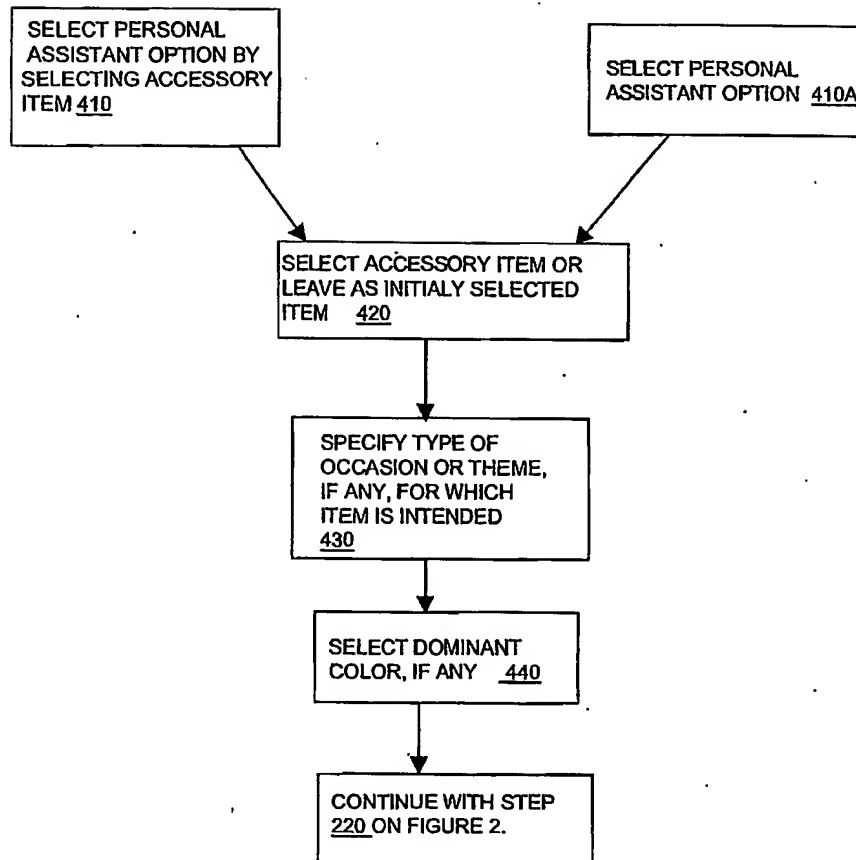


FIGURE 3

PATENT COOPERATION TREATY

PCT

DECLARATION OF NON-ESTABLISHMENT OF INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

(PCT Article 17(2)(a), Rules 13ter.1(c) and Rule 39)

Applicant's or agent's file reference 3862-4000	IMPORTANT DECLARATION	Date of mailing (day/month/year) 27/12/2001
International application No. PCT/IB 01/ 02033	International filing date (day/month/year) 30/10/2001	(Earliest) Priority date (day/month/year) 31/10/2000
International Patent Classification (IPC) or both national classification and IPC G06F17/60		
Applicant PIANEZZA, Paolo		

This International Searching Authority hereby declares, according to Article 17(2)(a), that no international search report will be established on the international application for the reasons indicated below

1. ☐ The subject matter of the international application relates to:
 - a. ☐ scientific theories.
 - b. ☐ mathematical theories
 - c. ☐ plant varieties.
 - d. ☐ animal varieties.
 - e. ☐ essentially biological processes for the production of plants and animals, other than microbiological processes and the products of such processes.
 - f. ☒ schemes, rules or methods of doing business.
 - g. ☐ schemes, rules or methods of performing purely mental acts.
 - h. ☐ schemes, rules or methods of playing games.
 - i. ☐ methods for treatment of the human body by surgery or therapy.
 - j. ☐ methods for treatment of the animal body by surgery or therapy.
 - k. ☐ diagnostic methods practised on the human or animal body.
 - l. ☐ mere presentations of information.
 - m. ☐ computer programs for which this International Searching Authority is not equipped to search prior art.


2. ☐ The failure of the following parts of the international application to comply with prescribed requirements prevents a meaningful search from being carried out:

☐ the description
 ☐ the claims
 ☐ the drawings

3. ☐ The failure of the nucleotide and/or amino acid sequence listing to comply with the standard provided for in Annex C of the Administrative Instructions prevents a meaningful search from being carried out:

☐ the written form has not been furnished or does not comply with the standard.
 ☐ the computer readable form has not been furnished or does not comply with the standard.

4. Further comments:

Name and mailing address of the International Searching Authority  European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2 NL-2280 HV Rijswijk Tel. (+31-70) 340-2040, Tx. 31 651 epo nl, Fax: (+31-70) 340-3016	Authorized officer Lucia Van Pinxteren
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FURTHER INFORMATION CONTINUED FROM PCT/ISA/ 203

The claims relate to subject matter for which no search is required according to Rule 39 PCT. Given that the claims are formulated in terms of such subject matter or merely specify commonplace features relating to its technological implementation, the search examiner could not establish any technical problem which might potentially have required an inventive step to overcome. Hence it was not possible to carry out a meaningful search into the state of the art (Art. 17(2)(a)(i) and (ii) PCT; see Guidelines Part B Chapter VIII, 1-6).

The applicant's attention is drawn to the fact that claims relating to inventions in respect of which no international search report has been established need not be the subject of an international preliminary examination (Rule 66.1(e) PCT). The applicant is advised that the EPO policy when acting as an International Preliminary Examining Authority is normally not to carry out a preliminary examination on matter which has not been searched. This is the case irrespective of whether or not the claims are amended following receipt of the search report or during any Chapter II procedure. If the application proceeds into the regional phase before the EPO, the applicant is reminded that a search may be carried out during examination before the EPO (see EPO Guideline C-VI, 8.5), should the problems which led to the Article 17(2) declaration be overcome.